

**Policy on Quality Assurance  
of  
Examinations and Assessments**

12 February 2008  
Examination Board BSc&MSc Programmes  
Rotterdam School of Management  
Erasmus University

## SONNET VAN DE KWALITEIT

Tegen de opmars van de beunhaas gaat de strijd.  
Hoe raken we in een tijd van surrogaat  
En overloed de ruggengraat niet kwijt?  
Er is geen vrijheid denkbaar zonder maat.

Gezond verstand is vaak een rekenfeit.  
Het meest onstoffelijke valt te meten.  
Je weet precies: dat is een mooie meid.  
Of: ik zat naast een Judas bij het eten.

We kunnen zinnig twisten over smaak.  
Zo is ook kwaliteit een klare zaak  
Die te betrappen valt, professioneel,

Behalve dan dat steeds voortvluchtig deel:  
Initiatief en inventiviteit  
De meetlat, niet de maat van kwaliteit.

*Gerrit Komrij*

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taken from the final report "Persuasion performing profiling" from the Committee Accreditation  
Higher Education

## Objective

The Examination Board oversees the testing and examination of the BSc & MSc programmes. In the light of these responsibilities of the Examination Board various measures have been taken in the past few years and assistance given to benefit initiatives designed to improve the quality and quality assurance of testing and examining.

The objective of this memorandum is to formulate the foundations under an integrated and transparent system of measures and facilities to improve and protect the quality of testing and examining: a total quality assurance policy for testing<sup>1</sup>. This testing policy must ensure that the Examination Board is in a position to guarantee involved parties (students, employees, society) that graduates have reached a level that fulfils the requirements for conferring a degree on them and presenting them their diploma. An integral policy is necessary for the civil validity of the diploma.

Integral policy is complex: it involves various aspects of assessing and examining, at various levels – policy related and operational – and many persons and bodies are involved in it in a certain way. The policy is bound by both legal framework and general principles such as the principle of academic freedom. The Examination Board has formulated core values on which the testing policy is built. Furthermore the “Table of Tests” (“Tafel van Toetsen”) of the Inspectorate of Education (Inspectie van het Onderwijs)<sup>2</sup> is an important guide for the testing policy.

In this memorandum the integral policy is examined on the basis of the following, in consecutive order: the frameworks; the core values; the principal players; quality requirements of examining; quality protection of examining.

## Frameworks

The general framework for the testing policy is the law governing higher education and academic research (WHW). By and as a result of this law the testing policy at university and faculty level is given form and worked out in, for example, the general part of the Student Statute, the Teaching and Examination Regulations of the Dean (OER)<sup>3</sup>, the Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board (R&R)<sup>4</sup>, and the accreditation frameworks (such as from the AACSB, the NVAO).

## Core values

The Examination Board has been given the assignment from the authorities to ensure and protect the quality of the tests of courses and the final examinations of the programmes. The Examination Board is implementing this task against the background of the following core values:

- Professionalism;
- Academic freedom;
- Fair play;
- Continuous improvement.

### *Professionalism*

The Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University, is a professional organisation. The organisation is to a greater degree autonomous in the establishment of educational and research programmes. The faculty are professionals. They are the pivotal point of the education and research. The quality of education and testing depends on the quality and commitment of the professionals. RSM has set quality demands with regard to the employment of faculty. Teachers must have a PhD or be pursuing a PhD. In this framework a *tenure track* has been formulated<sup>5</sup>. Part of the *tenure track* is on the one hand that faculty

<sup>1</sup> See p.55 of report 'Zicht op toetsen' from the Education Inspectorate of 2003.

<sup>2</sup> See [http://194.13.31.214/watdoenwij/soortenonderwijs/hogeronderwijs/Kwaliteit\\_toetsen\\_ho](http://194.13.31.214/watdoenwij/soortenonderwijs/hogeronderwijs/Kwaliteit_toetsen_ho) dated 8 January 2008.

<sup>3</sup> According to article 7.13 WHW.

<sup>4</sup> According to article 7.12 WHW.

<sup>5</sup> See 'Career Path Policy of the RSM Erasmus University: Tenure Track Document' dated 28 June 2007

must prove themselves in the field of education and research, but on the other hand that RSM provides personnel with the space and opportunity to fulfil the demands. Under the demands to be met not only are there professional demands such as sufficient publications, but also didactic demands including drafting of tests and assessment of students.

#### *Academic freedom*

In the continuation of academic professionalism lies the beginning of academic freedom. In the report 'Gewubd en gewogen' academic freedom is described as follows: "Academic freedom is composed – as well as the general and fundamental freedom of thought applying to every citizen – in particular from the individual freedom for a member of the faculty to deal with the relevant subjects in the field of education and research in a way that – both in terms of content as well as method – in his opinion is academically responsible, certainly in as far as the permitted means allow. He cannot be convinced or prevented from approaching subjects from a particular philosophy or academic theory".<sup>6</sup> Testing policy and measures, facilities and decisions resulting from this must take academic freedom into account. This is also established in the WHW, article 1.6: "Academic freedom will be taken into account at the institutions".

However, academic freedom is not unlimited. The academic freedom is limited by the mutual division of work, for example, within the department and the teaching and examinations regulations of the various courses. The teacher must bear in mind in teaching and testing the given learning objectives, qualification descriptors and level of the curriculum of the programme. The Examination Board can give rules and regulations to teachers with regard to the norms and procedure of testing.

#### *Fair play*

Fair play is intended to mean that the testing and examining is fair and just. In this way students have the right<sup>7</sup> to know on time how they will be tested and on what they will be assessed. Students are expected to participate loyally and to not acquire credits in an unethical way by, for example, profiting from group work or indulging in fraud. Assessments must give a dependable impression of the individual student performance<sup>8</sup>. Testing and examining must therefore be transparent. Transparency of testing and examining is also a condition of providing external accountability. Where necessary, the programme's management should facilitate and take measures to make transparency possible.

#### *Continuous improvement*

The core value of *continuous improvement* stands for the idea that the integrated testing policy must contribute to an improvement in quality of the curriculum. The Examination Board does not wish to operate only as an organ of maintenance of law and order, but strives to create a constructive learning climate so that a continuous improvement of testing quality is possible.

### **The principal players**

In the testing policy of the RSM many persons and bodies (internal and external) in different ways are directly or indirectly involved. To illustrate this, a non-exhaustive summing up of involved parties in alphabetical order is: the academic departments; the academic directors; alumni; the Dean RSM; the Dean BSc & MSc Programmes; employers (External Advisory Board); examiners/teachers; the Examination Administration; the Examination Appeals Board; the Examination Board; the Executive Board of the University; the Faculty Council; the Programme Committees; programme directors; student advisers; student counsellors; students; the Teaching Expertise Centre Rotterdam (OECR). For the purpose of this

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<sup>6</sup> Translation from "Gewubd en gewogen" report of the of the Management Reform Committee, chamber segment 15515 nos.1-2 p.166, Tweede Kamer zitting, 1978-1979.

<sup>7</sup> The legal principle fair play is also established in legal articles, such as article 7.13 WHW in which it is established that in the teaching and examinations regulation of the programme the examination methods must at least be indicated.

<sup>8</sup> Also in the case of group work the individual performance must be possible to assess. It is often assumed that students divide their working tasks and effort evenly. In the testing manual the Examination Board explore this further.

memorandum it would be going too far to describe in detail the specific role of all parties involved.

In practise the testing policy is determined to an important extent by cooperation between the Dean BSc&MSc Programmes, the academic departments, the examiners/teachers, and the Examination Board. But it is the student that is tested and in this way the decisive factor in the testing result. Here suffices a brief description of the roles of these 'principal players' in the framework of the testing policy.

1. *Dean BSc&MSc Programmes*: mandated by the Dean RSM to steer and manage the educational programmes. The Dean BSc&MSc Programmes determines the arrangement of educational courses (subjects, learning objectives, qualification descriptors etc.) and the implementation (assignment of teachers via the departments). He is advised in this by the Programme Committee. The Teaching and examinations regulation per programme is prepared by the Dean BSc&MSc Programmes. The teaching and examinations regulations are a central document in the framework of the testing policy. In this document the learning objectives of the subjects and the qualification descriptors of the programmes are determined, rules are laid down with the manner in which testing must take place, how often tests must take place, etc. The Dean BSc&MSc Programmes is responsible for the quality of teaching. Hereby the teaching and examinations regulations are regularly assessed and adjusted where necessary.
2. *Academic departments*: the teaching of the courses is done by the academic departments. Within the academic department the tasks are divided. The department must ensure that the tasks can be carried out in the correct manner. This means on the one hand a balanced division of teaching, research and management tasks and on the other, in the framework of the personnel policy, sufficient opportunity for individual improvement and growth.
3. *Teachers/examiners*: for the purpose of conducting exams the Examination Board appoints examiners. At professional level the examiners are the primary responsible individuals. The setting up of tests and evaluation of students is part of their discretionary authority. The extent of this authority is limited by the levels of agreement in relationships within the academic department, the teaching and examination regulations of the programme and the guidelines of Examination Board.
4. *Examination Board*: is the central organ within RSM tasked to protect the quality of testing. The Examination Board has a pivotal function on different levels with regard to the tests and examinations. The Examination Board has a general supervision with reference to the conducting of examinations. The Board must ensure that the tests as a whole comply with the qualification descriptors formulated for the programme. The Board awards the degrees, takes measures in the case of fraud and ensures the quality of tests and examinations. Furthermore, the Examination Board has a management, regulatory task with regard to the organisation and coordination of the examinations. In this respect the Examination Board can set order regulations and give guidelines and indications to examiners. This has its impact in the so-called Rules and Guidelines ('Regels en Richtlijnen' or R&R). It is furthermore the Examination Board that bestows faculty with the authority to conduct examinations. A member of faculty may only test if he/she has been authorised to do so by the Examination Board.
5. *Students*: while students do not establish the testing policy, or only indirectly via membership of a Programme Committee or the Faculty Council or via student evaluations of subjects, the test result depends especially on the intellectual capacities, the level and degree of effort of the students. A test can be qualitatively good, but what if the students do not possess the necessary prior knowledge? The students on RSM programmes originate from various prior study backgrounds, national and international, and therefore possess different prior knowledge. In brief, in the framework of an integral testing policy measures should be taken to monitor and optimise the capacities, level and effort of students.

### **Quality of tests**

By tests is hereby meant: a written, verbal or other investigation, including practical, or a combination of these, into the insight, the knowledge and skills of the student, as well as the

assessment of that investigation<sup>9</sup>. The teacher designs the test, defines the norms and gives grades.

According to the Inspectorate of Education tests must fulfil the following demands: validity, reliability, transparency and efficiency. The Inspectorate sees these demands worked out as follows<sup>10</sup>:

#### *Validity*

Tests are valid if they actually measure what they are supposed to measure.

1. There is a relationship between learning goals/competencies, test content and test form, established in a test matrix, for example.
2. The degree of difficulty of the tests is in agreement with the level of the course/programme segment.
3. There is variety in test forms, in line with the various learning goals of the programme.

#### *Reliability*

The reliability is the extent to which the measuring results can be relied upon, the extent to which scores are consistent, accurate and capable of being reproduced.

4. Assessment criteria are made explicit in an assessment model.
5. Assessment criteria are based on learning goals.
6. In open tests such as an open questions test or a thesis, the work is assessed by more than one examiner.

#### *Transparency*

It is clear to those involved which objectives the test attempts to measure, in what way the test will operate and how performance will be judged.

7. Students are informed of the learning goals that the tests attempt to measure.
8. Students are informed of the form and the extent of the tests and know how much time is available.
9. Students are informed on which aspects they will be assessed and which norms are maintained.
10. Students are entitled to receive feedback regarding the content and result of the tests. For this purpose a term is set for an opportunity to peruse work submitted and graded.

#### *Efficiency*

The information gained through testing is weighed against the required effort, particularly regarding time.

11. Tests are offered evenly spread throughout the year.
12. There is a balanced offer of re-sits.
13. Testing time and teaching time are in balance.
14. The test assignments are clearly and concisely formulated.
15. In certain cases the manner of testing is adjusted to the conditions of the student.

The Examination Board subscribes these demands in general terms. Some points – such as, for example, multiple assessment of open question tests – are not always easy to implement. In a testing manual for examiners the Examination Board provides an explanation and further clarification of these demands. Insofar as possible the quality demands are established in the 'Rules and Guidelines' of the Examination Board and the 'Teaching and Examination Regulations' of the course.

### **Quality assurance of testing**

Quality assurance involves rules, policy and procedures enabling insight into whether the test policy is carried out in the correct manner. The quality assurance consists of:

1. (policy)regulations for testing and examining;
2. supervision of observance of the testing policy;

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<sup>9</sup> Taken from the establishment of definitions from the teaching and examination regulations from the courses.

<sup>10</sup> See the 'Table of tests' on the previously mentioned website.

3. development of expertise of teachers in the field of testing;
4. checking the testing is in line with the learning goals of programmes;
5. checking whether learning goals of the courses are reached;
6. measures/sanctions in the case of actions or decisions in defiance of the regulations;
7. legal protection in the framework of testing and examining.

The following instruments are maintained within the framework of quality assurance.

### *1. Issuing of regulations for testing and examining*

#### The Teaching and Examination Regulations

Annually the dean sets Teaching and Examination Regulations per programme. In this document the curriculum of the programme is established. Per segment the extent and level is established. There are also rules regarding the establishment of a permanent consecutive order of subjects, rules regarding exemption of certain segments, rules regarding the manner in which tests are carried out and how frequently testing is done. In the examination regulations admission requirements for prospective students are also established. The Teaching and Examination Regulations are prepared by the Dean BSc&MSc Programmes, in consultation with the Programme Committee (composed of faculty and students) and the Examination Board. The Faculty Council must be in agreement with the Teaching and Examination Regulations<sup>11</sup>.

#### Rules and Guidelines

Annually the Examination Board establishes Rules and Guidelines with regard to the programmes. These rules and guidelines concern assessment rules in particular, compensation rules, fail/pass rules, fraud sanctions and order regulations.

#### Testing manual

To support examiners the Examination Board establishes a testing manual. In this manual advice, guidelines, information and procedures can be found with regard to the basic demands of testing such as test forms, peer review, the cutting score (pass mark) and also suggestions for measures and procedures to prevent improper granting of study points (by fraud or copycat behaviour) are included as well as rules relating to insight therein and processing and administration of results.

#### Guidelines for the organisation of testing and examining

The Examination Board introduces guidelines with regard to the logistics of testing. The guidelines concern for example the planning in of tests (such as distribution and integration of tests), the demands to be met by test locations (also for students with limitations), the efforts and instructions for supervisors and instructions in the context of prevention of fraud.

### *2. Supervision of the fulfilment of the testing policy*

#### Examinations monitor

This monitoring system enables the Examination Board to receive information about the examinations set with quality assurance in mind. In 2001 the Examination Board set up an examinations monitor system together with the Teaching Expertise Centre Rotterdam (OECR). After each trimester the examinations are reviewed, presently only bachelor examinations. As well as factors such as yields, averages, cutting score, reliability scores (in m.c. examinations) details are also included on matters such as the manner in which the course is examined, the marks are established and *student evaluations* done. All examiners will be informed about the details concerning their course. The Examination Board deals in a reticent manner with the details of the examinations monitor. On the basis of the monitor details alone it cannot be established if an examination complies with expectations/standards. Certain outcomes lead to further research. In some cases the appropriate examiner is asked for comment. After this the Examination Board will decide on the basis of the core values if further steps will be necessary to improve the quality of the testing. Improvement points will be communicated to the teacher and department where necessary.

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<sup>11</sup> See article 9.38 WHW.

### 3. Development of expertise of teachers in terms of testing

#### Examination service point

Development of expertise and training of faculty regarding setting up good tests is part of the quality assurance of testing. Since the year 2000 faculty can receive specific support in examination construction at the Teaching Expertise Centre Rotterdam (OECR). The aim is that teachers can direct their questions there in the course of setting examinations, making score-sheets, establishing the cutting scores, evaluating examination questions, instructing correcting assistants and suchlike. Training in testing and evaluation should be structurally embedded in the personnel policy of departments.

### 4. Checking if the testing is in line with the learning objectives of subjects

#### Checking course manuals in advance

Per subject the learning objectives and testing are described in course manuals. The Examination Board methodically checks whether the testing matches the learning objectives. The Examination Board will seek advice from external experts where needed. To implement this control the concept course manuals are presented to the Examination Board via the programme coordinators.

### 5. Checking if end terms of courses are reached

#### Checking if the entirety of learning objectives aligns with the qualification descriptors

The Dean BSc&MSc Programmes assumes responsibility for adequate matching of learning objectives of the courses in the curriculum with the qualification descriptors of the programmes. In these matters the Programme Committee and the OECR hold an advisory position towards the Dean BSc&MSc Programmes. The programme's study guides annually confirm and update the learning objectives of courses and qualification descriptors of a programme. The RSM Examination Board's chief responsibility is to guard and monitor the quality, validity and reliability, of examinations and tests that lead to a science-degree of RSM Erasmus University as expounded in the Rules and Regulations of those degrees. In line with that responsibility the Examination Board certifies, as manifested in awarding diplomas at the conclusion of programmes, that the curriculums' examinations and tests are agreeing with learning objectives demonstrating attainment of the programme's qualification descriptors.

#### Checking of masters theses

Theses are evaluated by at least two examiners. Furthermore the quality of the thesis is monitored by or on behalf of the Examination Board by means of a '*sampled monitoring*': per graduation period a random selection of theses is made where designated staff members observe defences and report their findings under the direct authority of the Examination Board. This monitoring occurs according to a yet to be established protocol. Furthermore, excellent theses are evaluated in the manner of an extra quality assurance method by a member of the *senior faculty*: the '*excellence monitoring*'.

#### Evaluations/interviews alumni and external advisory board

On an ongoing basis the RSM alumni network and the external advisory board are asked to give their opinion whether or not the content and manner of testing match to the needs and wishes of the professional practice.

### 6. Measures/sanctions in the case of actions or decisions in opposition to the test policy.

#### Measures against students in the case of fraud

The Examination Board has established the legal<sup>12</sup> measures in the Regulations and Guidelines that can be encountered in the case that a student commits fraud<sup>13</sup>. These measures can be composed of:

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<sup>12</sup> Article 7.12 paragraph 4 of the WHW

<sup>13</sup> The Examination Board sets rules with regard to good implementation of examinations and with respect to measures to be taken in this regard. The measures can include that in the case of fraud by a student the examination



- a. reprimand;
- b. examination concerned declared invalid;
- c. exclusion of the examination concerned for no more than one year;
- d. exclusion of one or more examination periods;
- e. a combination of the above-named measures, with a maximum of no more than one year exclusion for all examinations.

The measures and the procedures are established in the Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board.

#### Measures against students in the case of breach of the peace

Everyone in the buildings or on the premises of the university or who uses the facilities of the university must abide by the regulations of public order and instructions in the framework that is given<sup>14</sup>. Also regarding the use of examination areas and facilities there are set rules. These rules are meanwhile anchored in the Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board. The following measures can be taken against the student that does not abide by the rules or behaves in an unacceptable manner:

- a warning;
- a reprimand;
- a monetary fine, when this is contractual or is agreed upon by demand;
- a temporary (maximum ten working days), conditional or definitive denial of access to the buildings and grounds of the university or use of the facilities of the university. In the case of abuse of internet the ERNA-account will be closed. In the case of denial the student in question, if possible in advance, given the opportunity to respond verbally or in writing. The student can be supported in this by a councillor;
- in the case of breach of the instructions regarding clothing: immediate denial of the teaching situation, tests or examinations in question.

The student can object to decisions directly affecting him by approaching the Executive Board of the university and submit a complaint to the Higher Education Appeals Board. Lodging an appeal will not lead to a suspension as indicated in the Order Rules.

#### Measures against personnel members

If a member of personnel of the university behaves contrary to the examination regulations, he can be called to explain by his direct superior in the form of an evaluation meeting or otherwise. Possible improvement trajectories can be discussed. As an extreme measure in the framework of personnel policy there is the possibility of implementing disciplinary measures conforming to the CAO-NU.

#### Withholding examination authority of teacher

The Examination Board can, as an extreme measure in the case of apparent continual dysfunction with regard to testing, deny the examination authority of the teacher. This will obviously not occur until after discussion with the teacher in question and the teacher's superior and after reasonable opportunities to improve performance.

### *7. Legal protection in the framework of testing and examining*

#### Legal procedure in the framework of tests and examinations

The protection of the legal position of the students at a public university such as Erasmus University Rotterdam is included in the law. A student who objects to, among other things, a decision of an examiner (e.g. assessments) or the Examination Board may lodge an appeal at the Examination Appeals Board of the EUR. The Examination Appeals Board can, if the appeal is grounded, overturn the objectionable decision entirely or partially, so that a new decision can be made.

#### Complaint procedure

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board can insist that, during a period of time set by them, lasting for a term of no more than a year, the student will lose the right to sit one or more to be indicated tests or examinations at the institution.

<sup>14</sup> See [http://cms.eur.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/ieb/ordereglement\\_gebouwen\\_en\\_terreinen.pdf](http://cms.eur.nl/fileadmin/ASSETS/ieb/ordereglement_gebouwen_en_terreinen.pdf)

A supplementary procedure for protection of the rights of students is the internal EUR-complaint procedure. A student that is unfairly treated can apply at the university for the mediation and processing of his complaint to one of the student counsellors. He must in advance have applied to the staff member or organisational segment over whom he wishes to complain.

The student counsellor has the task of mediating between the complainer and the staff member or organisational segment relative to the complaint. If mediation meets no success the student counsellor can approach the Dean of the school or the Executive Board of the university so that they can take further steps.